

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

To Dorothy A Son-Golden, 11/19/51. Herman Shumlin presents London success by Roger MacDougall. Ronald Howard, Hildy Parks, Stella Andrew and Martin Rudy are featured in cast, directed by Shumlin...Never Say Never-Booth, 11/20/51. Albert F. Rosen and Lester Meyer present a new comedy by Carl Leo, directed by Robert H. Sinclair. Cast includes Anne Jackson, Hugh Reilly, Don Briggs. Gigi-Fulton, 11/24/51. Gilbert Miller presents new drama by Anita Loos, adapted from Colette's novel. Directed by Raymond Rouleau, cast featuring Cathleen Nesbitt, Michael Evans and Josephine Brown.

Digests of Current Reviews - more on Page 3

Paint Your Wagon-Shubert, 11/12/51. Majority of daily reviewers recommended musical about gold rush by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, though opinions on many elements were diverse. Three filed "con" reviews. Times, News, Mirror, World Telegram & Sun, Eagle, Women's Wear Daily and Press critics praised James Barton and newcomer Olga San Juan. They lavished adjectives on Agnes de Mille's lively dances, and equally lively scenery and costumes by Oliver Smith and Motley. Robust male chorus also was complimented. Atkinson, Times, found it a bountiful, exultant musical jamboree. Hawkins, WT&S, noted that the restless hope and loneliness of the script remained more than the happy moments. Dissenters blamed book trouble. Kerr, Herald Tribune, thought it was too earnest a proposition with no fun, while Watts, Post, noted plot was simply not very interesting. Garland, Journal American, thought repetitious book proved that too much of the same thing is not good. Several commented that there was too much dancing in the show. Coleman, Mirror, thinks good musical will be even better after it is out a bit. There was a wide range of opinion on the hit-making possibilities of the songs.

Dinosaur Wharf-National, 11/8/51-11/10/51. Short-lived new play by Joel Wyman, produced by Terese Hayden lasted four performances. Only Chapman, News and WCBS Bill Leonard praised drama of waterfont, though most tabbed author a promising young playwright worth watching. General consensus was that author was not equal to his idea and that his drama was not as exciting as the real thing. Samuel Leve's setting was really the star of the evening, receiving rave notices from critics of Mirror, Journal American, and New Leader. Cast headed by Lois Wheeler, Leo Penn and James Gregory were praised by some, condemned by others for turning in stock acting job. Harrison Dowd, sole performer to receive unanimous praise. Chapman, News, thought play was taut, tough and timely, while WCBS Bill Leonard felt play, despite its weaknesses deserved a chance and an audience. Funke, Times, panned it as an unsteady work which couldn't decide whether it was a social tract or a melodramatic love story.

Out of Town Reviews

Trade paper reviewers split over merits of Nina, the John C. Wilson and H.M. Tennant production of Samuel Taylor's adaptation of Rossin's play starring Gloria Swanson and David Niven. Eck, Variety, viewing it in Hartford suggests much doctoring will be needed, while Taylor, Billboard, thought the Boston performance provided a diverting evening. Alan Webb, they both boted, stole the performance from the two stars. Show will open in NY December 5th at the Royale.

' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

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|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 12. Chr. Science Monitor | 23. WCBS Leonard |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 13. Journal of Commerce | 24. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 14. Morning Telegraph-WFDR | 25. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 15. Ward Morehouse | 26. Nation |
| 5. NY Compass | 16. George Jean Nathan | 27. New Leader-WEVD |
| 6. NY Post | 17. Wall Street Journal | 28. New Republic |
| 7. NY Journal American | 18. Women's Wear | 29. Newsweek |
| 8. NY World Tele-Sun | 19. Billboard | 30. New Yorker |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Variety | 31. Park East |
| 10. LI Press | 21. Critical Digest | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News | 22. Theatre Arts | 33. Time |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

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| AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50 | Con: 1-6-9-11-12-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-25-28-29-32.
None Yet: 10-14-21-26. So-So: 31. |
| BAREFOOT IN ATHENS-10/31/51 | Con: 1-2-10-15.
None Yet: 12-13-14-16-through 22-25 through 33. |
| BAGELS AND YOX-9/12/51 | Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-9-10-15-16-19-20-21-25-27-28.
None Yet: 12-13-14-17-18-22-23-24-26-29-30-31-32- |
| BORSCHT CAPADES-9/17/51 | Con: 1-2-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-21-25-27-28-30. 33.
None Yet: 12-14-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-26-29-31-32- |
| CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50 | Con: 19-22-26-28. So-So: 3. 33.
None Yet: 10-14-21-23. 33. |
| FAITHFULLY YOURS-10/18/51 | Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-15-18-20-21-22-25-29-30-
None Yet: 12-13-14-16-17-19-24-26-27-28-31-32. |
| THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51 | Con: 2-6-15-16-27-30-33.
None Yet: 13-14-17-18-22-24-26-28-29-31-32. |
| GLAD TIDINGS-10/11/51 | Con: 1-2-4-5-6-7-15-17-18-19-20-24-25-26-29-30-33.
None Yet: 10-12-14-16-21-22-27-28-31-32. |
| GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50 | Con: 26. None Yet: 10-21. |
| LOVE AND LET LOVE-10/19/51 | Con: 1 through 10-18-20-23-25-29-30-33.
None Yet: 12 through 17-21-22-24-26-27-28-31-32. |
| THE KING AND I-3/29/51 | Con: 26. None Yet: 10-21-22-23-24. |
| THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51 | Con: 16-22. None Yet: 10-21-26-32. |
| MUSIC IN THE AIR-10/8/51 | CON: 5-6-7-8-15-16-17-20-22-23-24-33.
None Yet: 12-14-19-21-26-27-28-30-31-32. |
| THE NUMBER-10/30/51 | Con: 1-2-4-8-9-23-24. through 33.
None Yet: 10-11-12-13-15-16-17-19-20-21-22-25 |
| REMAINS TO BE SEEN-10/3/51 | Con: 1-7-16-21-24-28-33.
None Yet: 12-13-17-22-27-28. |
| SAINT JOAN-10/4/51 | Con: 2-4-6-15-23-24-32-33.
None Yet: 12-13-14-16-17-22-25-31. |
| SEVENTEEN-6/22/51 | Con: 2-4-6-26-29-30-33.
None Yet: 10-21-22-27-28-32. |
| SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49 | Con: 33. So-So: 25.
None Yet: 5-9-10-11-21-24-26-27-28. |
| STALAG 17-5/8/51 | Con: 4-25-26-27-30. So-So: 3.
None Yet: 10-21-22. |
| TOP BANANA-11/1/51 | Con: 6-7-27. 31-32-33.
None Yet: 12-15-16-19-20-21-22-24-25-26-28-29-30- |
| A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51 | Con: 2-7-16-19-26-27-32-33.
None Yet: 10-15-21-22. So-So: 31. |
| TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51 | Con: 2-3-26. None Yet: 10-12-22-27-28-32. |

' Green Room Department '

LONDON "PACIFIC"...American and British critics just don't seem to agree on merits of South Pacific, starring Mary Martin. But Herald Tribune editorial is glad to see that the taste of the public in both countries is the same when it comes to American musicals, no matter what the English critics might say...Watts, Post, now convinced that London critics do more to damage Anglo-American relations than any of their fellow countrymen since George III...Winchell surprised British accused show of being pro-American, for we never called Noel Coward's works pro-British...Sobol notes that in spite of the notices Martin wrote sweet and disarming notes to the reviewers.

WHY THEY FAIL...Without mentioning any names Durling, Journal American, states that one reason why certain shows fail is that a "name" must be used in the cast to get backers. The "name" usually demands changes that will be to his personal advantage, also making sure no one steals the show from him. Because the star considers only his part and not the rest of the show, the play usually flops.

COLUMN TIPS...Many theatre men believe that in 1952 the top price for tickets for musicals may go to \$8.40 whispers Kilgallen...Paint Your Wagon star James Barton's temperament rumors only "Irish temperament" assures Walker.

FARM CLUB...Equity Library Theatre is an active and productive farm club for the Big Leagues of Broadway, praises Burr, Playbill. Besides giving young actors a chance to learn their art and bringing theatre to outlying communities, ELT has been instrumental in breaking down type casting barriers for ambitious actors.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Herald Tribune reviews by Walter F. Kerr admired by Watts, Post, who complimented the "guest" critic for bringing a welcome fresh note to daily criticism...Streamling of The Number may turn new play into a fast, tense melodrama, predicts Sheaffer, Eagle.

MAIL BOX...Gabriel, Cue, filed protest with Sobol, Journal American, on alleged quote columnist attributed to him in his "Along the Broadway Beat" book. After check-in the NY Public Library, Gabriel is positive he didn't pan Clare Boothe Luce's The Women, as the book states. Sobol admits he is caught with his quotes down, and asks aid to determine who said the following about what play. "One can get the same effect by sticking a finger down one's throat."

' Digests of Current Reviews '

The Number-Martin Beck, 10/30/51. Three mild "pros" and three "con" votes recorded on Arthur Carter's new melodrama, produced by Paul Vroom and Irving Cooper, by the weekly reviewers. Trade paper critics and Gabriel, Cue, panned play as an ineffective melodrama. Francis, Billboard, fears it wavers too often near soap opera, while Cue appraiser found much of it luke warm sour mash. Time, Newsweek, and New Yorker critics found enough interest and excitement in uneven script to recommend production. Murvyn Vye again walked off with acting honors, while most agreed that Martha Scott was miscast. Newsweek suggested that Carter's next melodrama may be the nippy one New Yorkers are waiting for. George Abbott direction was credited with making most of script.

' Theatre News Round Up '

AGVA members prevented from performing at ANTA tribute to Henry Rosenfield... 1951 edition of "Who's Where," theatre directory on stands..."Stubs", tenth edition, will be published in December..."Show Biz" has gone into second edition.

' Meet the Critic - Joseph T. Shipley '

Off Broadway theatre groups have been hurt financially by ANTA, Joseph T. Shipley told "Critical Digest" in an exclusive interview. The "New Leader" drama critic, who also broadcasts first night reviews over Station WEVD, knows that many who subscribed to ANTA last season did not support the off Broadway groups they usually do. It should be the plan of ANTA to encourage such theatre, not discourage it, he stated. Thus the reviewer thinks ANTA should not produce plays in New York City.

Shipley probably holds the current record for continuous drama reviewing for one publication. Since 1922 he has been drama critic of the weekly "New Leader." Before that he joined the magazine's predecessor "The Call" as assistant drama editor. The "WEVD First Nights" program started ten years ago, resulting as an outgrowth of a drama panel program on Station WMCA. At present it is the only regularly broadcast late evening review of the first night. Heard at 12 midnight, right after the opening, it often draws a studio audience of cast and staff of the show in question. They gather to hear the first critical word on their collective brainchild.

In all his critical work, be it for magazines, books or radio, Shipley tries to recognize and encourage "good" theatre. He tries to analyze the script, seeing if it follows logic. The author of 14 books he is currently working on "Guide to Great Plays" which will be published by Public Affairs Press, Washington, D.C. in the spring. The book will contain synopses, stage history, critical opinion including his own, on over 700 famous plays in theatre history. For this book he read over 3000 plays. By his own definition, a "great" play is one in which the audience gets entertainment or exaltation out of the theatre. Broadway producers, he noted, have been questioning him on what plays are no longer under copyright, and what scripts might make good musicals. Shipley is also revising his "Dictionary of World Literature," published by Philosophical Library.

The critic, who has recently been elected vice president of the NY Drama Critics Circle, believes that a few awards have value. But the multiplicity of awards in the drama field lessen their distinction. On the vital question of TV, Shipley has no fears that it will interfere with the direct interaction of player and audience which can only be obtained in the theatre.

Though he is not doing any teaching now, the critic has had wide experience at diverse schools. A graduate of City College, he obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. at Columbia. His first teaching job was as an instructor of English at Stuyvesant High School. This was followed by ten years at City College and six at Brooklyn College. He also conducted a professional playwrights workshop at the Drama Workshop for two years. One of the scripts discussed was Edward Mabley's Glad Tidings, now on Broadway.

' Legit Stuff '

Shows that closed include Lace on Her Petticoat, Dinosaur Wharf and A Sleep for Prisoners...Bert Lahr to head Macy parade...Woody Soames, Oakland Tribune, viewing the hits in New York City...Ward Morehouse, WT&S, back home after blood transfusions at Lenox Hill Hospital..."Drama Desk" hosted Top Banana producers Michael Sloane and Paula Stone, Phil Silvers not arriving due to knee injury...King Lear scenery offered to little theatre groups for handling costs by producers...Borscht Capades moves to Broadway on December 3rd...Portrait of John Golden unveiled in Lambs Club...Masons honored 108th anniversary of birth of Edwin Booth at Booth Theatre...Fifth edition of ANTA Album due in March, ANTA assembly probably will be held in Chicago later, in the spring...League of NY Theatres discuss wage contract with ATPAM.

